

ANGUS COUNCIL

COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE – 28 SEPTEMBER 2021

AFGHAN RELOCATION SCHEMES

REPORT BY ALISON SMITH, INTERIM DIRECTOR OF VIBRANT COMMUNITIES AND SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this report is to update members on the UK-wide Afghan Locally Employed Staff (LES) Relocation Scheme, and to seek agreement in principle for participating in the further re-settlement scheme for Afghan refugees that has been announced by the UK Government.

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Committee:

- (i) Note the position on the previously approved Council participation in the Afghan LES scheme to provide relevant support to re-settle 10 families of up to 50 individuals
- (ii) Agree that the Council should commit in principle to taking part in the further Afghanistan Citizens Resettlement Scheme for refugees
- (iii) Agree to extend the delegated authority for the Deputy Chief Executive to manage any necessary changes to the detailed arrangements as the 2 schemes evolve

2. ALIGNMENT TO THE COUNCIL PLAN/COMMUNITY PLAN

2.1 This report contributes to the following local outcomes contained within the Angus Community Plan:

- PEOPLE:** 1. Improved physical, mental and emotional health and well-being
PLACE : 2. Safe, secure, vibrant and sustainable communities

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 Members will recall that in June the Council agreed to help re-locate 10 Afghan families of locally employed staff (LES), up to 50 individuals, who were being urgently evacuated from Afghanistan, because of the potential risks arising from the accelerated removal of coalition forces from that country. Several thousand in total are being re-located across the UK. Initially they have been placed in bridging accommodation consisting of hotels and serviced apartments around the country, until a pathway to re-settlement is established.

3.2 Given the urgency of the fast moving political and military situation, the Council, working in co-ordination with the Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP), and with COSLA, the Home Office (HO) and the Ministry of Defence (MOD), had made swift progress to put suitable arrangements in place. However, during August the situation in Afghanistan took a further dramatic turn, with a sudden regime change triggering an increase in the urgency of evacuation arrangements on the ground.

3.3 As a result, the UK Government have announced a further re-location package, this time with a commitment for 20,000 Afghan Citizen refugees to be re-located across the UK in the next 5 years. All Local Authorities are being asked to participate.

3.4 A report by HSCP colleagues will also be submitted to the Integration Joint Board.

4. CURRENT POSITION – LES SCHEME

- 4.1 A multi-discipline team was formed in June to deliver the LES initiative, made up of officers from the Council, HSCP, VAA and community partners. This team is currently managing all operational aspects of the scheme, and although there are logistical complexities in terms of making sure that the right support can be provided, the Council and its partners are fortunate to have experienced and skilled staff who were involved in previous refugee programmes.
- 4.2 10 properties have been leased from partners for up to 2 years to allow families to be temporarily accommodated in Angus until suitable permanent accommodation can be found. The cost to Angus Council of leasing the properties will be contained in the funding package that underwrites the scheme. The families will need to be found onward accommodation before the lease arrangement ends, either in social housing owned by the Council or Housing Associations, or in the private sector.
- 4.3 Once the leases were in place, the Home Office were able to start matching candidates to the accommodation, with the intention that the first families would arrive in September, and the remaining families soon after. The multi discipline team are currently working closely with the partners to provide the necessary wrap-around support that will be required by the families so they can orientate themselves and start their integration pathway into Scottish society.
- 4.4 Accommodation is only one aspect of the wrap-around support, the other challenges being managed are:
- Allocation to local schools and provision of appropriate support based on needs.
 - Social work and social care support for adults and children, in both short and long term.
 - Health and mental health support, at GP practices and acute hospital care.
 - English language lessons. Although many of the lead immigrants in the LES scheme speak English (having had interpreter roles), many family members do not.
 - Welfare Rights and employability support

5. PROPOSALS – AFGHANISTAN CITIZEN'S RESETTLEMENT SCHEME

- 5.1 As described above, the situation in Afghanistan has triggered a wave of refugees seeking asylum elsewhere. The UK Government has committed to re-locating 20,000 individuals in the UK over the course of 5 years in an Afghanistan citizen's re-settlement scheme and has asked Local Authorities to help. It is recommended that members agree in principle to the Council participating further in the scheme and commit to providing all relevant support for a suitable number of refugees. Although exact numbers are not known at this stage, it is understood that up to 5000 individuals will be re-located in the UK as a whole in the first year.
- 5.2 The household profile of the candidates coming to Angus under this scheme would be governed to a large extent by the type and size of properties that can be sourced from the Council's housing stock or that of RSL partners, or the private sector. Members will know that there is pressure on housing availability in most parts of Angus. There is also high demand being experienced for the wrap-around support services that are required. However, if members agree to the proposed further commitment, the multi-discipline operational team will deliver the scheme, alongside the LES scheme. Any back-filling of posts that can be done practically would be funded from the support package(s), but clearly the activities required from the team to deliver the schemes is additional to routine tasks and current workload, so there is an inevitable impact on staff resources.
- 5.3 Members agreed in June to delegate authority to the Deputy Chief Executive to manage the necessary changes to the detailed arrangements for the LES scheme as it evolves. Members are now asked to extend this delegated authority to the further refugee resettlement scheme as it evolves.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 A grant funding package is provided by the Home Office for the LES scheme, which is much simpler than with previous refugee programmes. Cost projections estimate that the necessary support activities will be covered by the funding package provided, and there should be no adverse impact on the General Fund or the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) in the short term.

6.2 It is understood that a further funding package is being put in place by the Home Office for the Afghan Citizens Resettlement scheme, the details of which are awaited. However, it is likely to be very similar to previous funding arrangements, which have proved adequate for the support provision required.

7. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

7.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out previously.

NOTE: No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above report

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